

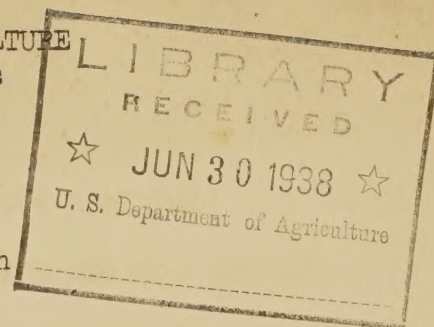
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UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
Bureau of Agricultural Economics

THE LAND PROGRAM
by
C. F. Clayton, In Charge
Division of Project Organization



(Address delivered at the dedication of the Magazine Mountain,
Arkansas, Land Utilization Project, April 28, 1938)

We have gathered here for a dedication.

These are occasions when man pauses to view the creative results of his own efforts - the products of his hands and brain. In a real sense, then, we come to dedicate ourselves to an ideal, to an aspiration: to an ideal and aspiration of which this project is, and can be, only a visible and partial expression.

You will feel with me, therefore, that we more nearly touch the substance of that common purpose which brings us together here, if I seek to deal with the ideas which this project in part reflects, with the program to which it in part gives expression, rather than with the statistics of the developments you see.

In telling you of conditions which this project, and other similar projects, are designed to improve, I come as no herald of impending disaster.

I decline to seek to alarm you with dark forebodings, if for no other reason, because I do not believe that we are chiefly motivated by our fears. Men undertake great enterprises because they are curious; because they find excitement in the challenge of new frontiers; because new and unsolved problems capture their imagination, arouse their enthusiasm, win their faith, loyalty, and devotion.

And we - you and I, the people of this State, the people of this Nation - we are engaged in a great enterprise.

The challenge we face is no less than this:

Can we build, can we establish and maintain, a vigorous, prosperous, progressive rural life for the rural families of this Nation?

Without that this Nation cannot permanently survive.

Our task is, in part, a task of restoration.

Our history is the history of the founding and development of a nation by an expanding population, facing the conquest of a succession of westward moving frontiers.

Our history is a history of pioneers.

As a people and as a nation we have reaped the rewards of the process of rapid expansion and exploitation which characterize a pioneering development.

That process was inevitable. It brought inevitable rewards.

It also brought inevitable costs.

The rewards are reflected in the establishment of this great country which is ours today, in our democratic institutions and processes.

The rewards belong to our past.

The costs belong to our future.

If the institutions which are the product of our history are to live, these costs must be paid.

That was always true. But what we have formerly dodged we can no longer escape: the process of making that payment must be undertaken by this generation; it must begin here and now.

What are those costs?

Superficially and concretely they include abandoned farms in New England; scattered settlers in the Lakes States; eroded and infertile farms of the old cotton piedmont; eroded and weed-infested fields of our hill country; poorly drained and water-logged bottom lands; overgrazed and depleted grass lands; creation of the new American desert on wind-blown grass land brought under the plow; rapid lowering of the water-table throughout our arid and semi-arid regions.

But these things reach back to something more fundamental. These concrete conditions merely testify to the fact that we have destroyed, by long years of exploitation, the fundamental balance in nature, the balance between man and land, between man and the flora and fauna upon which man's life depends. The destruction of our soils, forests, grass cover, game, fish, ponds and lakes means immeasurably more than mere physical and economic loss; for these things are the foundation of our democratic institutions, of the family, the home and the spiritual values which these represent.

I say to you: America can no longer shut her eyes to these problems; Americans can no longer be smug about the future of this country.

The budget of the American people can never be balanced until these costs are recognized, until these obligations to ourselves and to our children are assumed, until our National bookkeeping finds a permanent place for the retirement of this most important of all items in our National debt. It is a debt which, if paid, will add immeasurably to our assets. And, if history teaches us anything, it is a debt which can be forfeited only at the ultimate price of our national existence.

Nature is inexorable in her demands; and those demands we have flagrantly ignored. The balance between man and nature must be restored.

But how?

By the restoration of our soils? Yes. By the restoration of our game and fish? Yes. By the restoration of our natural grass lands? Yes. By the conservation of our surface and underground waters? Yes. By the restoration of woods and hills and streams for recreation? Yes. By the restoration of some part of our once magnificent forests? Yes.

But to what end?

Shall it be to the end that America may feed and clothe and house the whole world--only to starve in both body and soul? Shall it be to the end that rural America may find its communities depopulated, its local institutions destroyed, its population drained into the cities, the fertility of its soils shipped out to feed others, while the price is poverty and ruin of rural families?

Is it possible that our improved methods of communication and transportation can be employed only to export rural assets to cities for consumption?

Is it not time that we seriously undertook to export city assets to rural communities?

Is the rural community entitled to good preachers, commodious, comfortable, and attractive churches? Good teachers, and well located schools? Good physicians, rendering services at reasonable cost? Good hospitals, conveniently located?

But why ask these questions until the primary question has been asked--and answered?

And that question is this: Is the rural community itself entitled to live?

And if so, can it live on the terms of good preachers, teachers, physicians, and the other services and facilities essential to normal living in modern times? I think it should. I think it can. I think it must.

That is what this program is pointed to achieve.

By what methods?

Federal purchase of land? Yes, but only as one instrument.

Conversion of land acquired to forests, to game conservation, to recreation? Yes, but within limits, within very strict limits.

Those limits are defined by the objectives: To restore that balance between man and land resources which man himself has destroyed; to create a modern basis of rural life.

Trees, grass, game, fish, in large areas of our country, were once the foundation of rural communities. In this day these resources must be made an instrument, not for the depopulation of our rural areas, but for the maintenance of rural communities, through the reestablishment of essential rural industries on which these communities depend.

Civilization is a process of learning to live with nature. Living on nature is the characteristic process of savage and barbarian cultures. We cannot long eat the bread of civilization if we continue to employ the process of the savage and the barbarian in the utilization of our resources. The support of a civilized nation requires that we live with, not in opposition to, the forces of nature. Science is in essence a discovery of the processes of nature; its value is that man, by knowing these processes of nature, may cooperate with them.

But this we have refused or neglected to do.

Man said: We will turn our cattle out on the abundant native grasses of our western plains, until all the grass is gone.

Man said: When the rains come and the world calls for bread, we will put our natural grass lands under the plow to grow wheat to feed the world; forgetting tomorrow; forgetting the dry years to come; forgetting the plagues of grasshoppers; forgetting the winds that blow and the bare soil which the plow exposes to the wind's destructive force.

Man said: We will go to our forests (our inexhaustible forests, he called them) and we will cut all the trees to build houses for ourselves and for all who will buy our lumber.

Man said: On the poor soils where once grew magnificent trees, we will establish farms, and even the steep and denuded hillsides we will plant to fields of corn.

Man said: The game in the forests and woods will be starved and killed; the fish in lakes and streams will be taken without stint or limit.

To all of these acts of man, nature made the slow, patient, but firm and inexorable rejoinder: If man, from generation to generation, would enjoy the fruits of my abundance, then man must learn to know my ways and to keep my commandments.

And nature's answer is the final answer.

We must adapt the pattern of our rural life and institutions to meet the requirements of modern times. The right kind of farming must include not only crops of grain and hay, but also trees, game, and recreation.

We can't have that? And why not? It is nature's way. It represents the balanced use of our resources which nature demands of man: farms of the right size, in the right place; churches, schools, hospitals, camp grounds, and roads located with reference to the location of families, and families located in accordance with a pattern of land use that enables man to live in balance with nature.

The restoration of this balance - the creation of this modern pattern, this civilized adjustment of man to his resources - that, my friends, is the purpose of the program in which we are engaged.

Let us find in this project a symbol of the dedication of ourselves to these purposes, to these ends: that rural families in this State and region may labor efficiently to restore what has been lost and to create, through modern forms of rural organization, new opportunities for a prosperous and progressive rural life.

It is in this spirit, on behalf of the Bureau of Agricultural Economics of the United States Department of Agriculture, which I represent, that I dedicate this project to the welfare of the people of this State and region, firmly believing that by thus serving the purposes here represented we serve the interests of the whole people of this Nation.

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